

Common Key Words Used in Essay Questions

Compare	When you are asked to compare, you should examine qualities or characteristics in order to discover resemblances . The term compare is usually stated as compare with , and it implies that you are to emphasize similarities, although differences may be mentioned.
Contrast	When you are instructed to contrast, you should stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of associated things, qualities, events, or problems.
Criticize	In a criticism , you should express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration. You are expected to give the results of your own analysis and to discuss both limitations and good points.
Define	Definitions call for concise, clear, authoritative meanings . In such statements, details are seldom required, but boundaries or limitations of the definition should be briefly stated. You must keep in mind the class to which the item to be defined belongs, and whatever differentiates it from all other classes.
Discuss	The term discuss , which appears often in essay questions, directs you to examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and detailed answer.
Enumerate	The word enumerate specifies a list or outline form of reply. In such questions, you should recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.
Evaluate	In an evaluation question, you are expected to present a careful appraisal , stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal.
Explain	In explanatory answers, it is imperative that you clarify, elucidate, and interpret the material you present. In such an answer, it is best to state the "how" and "why," reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions which give rise to whatever you are examining.
Illustrate	A question which asks you to illustrate usually requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, diagram, or concrete example
Interpret	An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation . You are expected to translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually to give you judgment or reaction to the problem.
Justify	When you are instructed to justify your answer, you must prove, or show grounds for , decisions. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form.
List	Listing is similar to enumeration . You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or a tabulation. Such answers should always be concise .

Outline	An outline answer is organized description . You should give main points and essential supplementary materials, omit minor details, and present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification.
Prove	A question which requires proof is one which demands confirmation or verification . In such discussions, you should establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence, or by logical reasoning, with sufficient examples.
Relate	In a question which asks you to show the relationship or relate to, you answer should emphasize connections and associations , usually in descriptive form.
Review	A review usually specifies a critical examination . You should analyze and comment briefly, in organized sequence, upon the major points of the problem. Sometimes, however, a review question simply asks for a list.
State	In questions which direct you to specify, give, state, or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief, clear form. Details and examples may be omitted.
Summarize	When you are asked to summarize or present a summary, you should give, in condensed form, the main points or facts. All details, illustrations, and elaborations are to be omitted.
Trace	When a question asks you to trace a course of events, you are to give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin. Such questions may call for probing or for deductions.

Note: The word **analyze** is seldom used directly in essay questions, but the process of analysis is involved in answering most of the listed types. If you are asked to analyze, chances are the question requires you to give reasons, interpret, compare, contrast, define, evaluate, or interpret.